HU2702 Ethical Theory and Moral Problems
Fall semester, 2006

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Course Content

In this course, we shall discuss certain fundamental questions about ethics and morality including how we tell whether an action is right or wrong, what the nature of the good life is, whether morality is objective (in some sense) or is determined by people’s subjective desires or preferences, and whether our moral obligations depend entirely on the consequences of our actions or are affected by other types of considerations. We shall also address specific questions about our ethical obligations such as how far each of us should go in alleviating hunger and suffering in the world at large and what ethical obligations, if any, we have to animals. We shall study and critically evaluate the ideas of prominent moral philosophers who have reflected on and written about these questions.

Examinations

There will be 3 major exams during the semester, spaced more or less evenly during the term. The third exam will occur near the end of the semester, probably during the 13th or 14th week. There will also be an optional final exam during final exam week, December 18–22.

Course Paper

Your will write a formal course paper on some topic in moral philosophy. You will choose your topic from a list of topics that will be provided. Each topic will raise some controversial ethical question, and you will defend your own original answer to it in your paper. You will identify and critically evaluate arguments on both sides of the question you have chosen and then present and defend your own views on that question. Your grade on your paper will depend largely on how thoroughly you explore your question and how convincingly you support your conclusions. Your paper should be no longer than is needed to cover your topic adequately—i.e., to discuss the pertinent arguments and to present and defend your own views on the ethical question. Typically this turns out to be about 5–7 double-spaced typewritten pages. However, there is no length requirement.

You may, if you choose, submit a draft of your paper to the course instructor for his comments and suggestions prior to turning in your final paper. Specific directions and guidelines for the final papers will be provided later.
Quizzes

Short quizzes on reading assignments and material presented in class may occasionally be given. Your quiz grades will be part of your class participation grade. (See below.)

Class Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend class regularly and to come to each class prepared to discuss the topic of the day. It is your responsibility to determine what material was covered and what announcements were made during any class that you miss.

You will be allotted 2 absences for the course. If you miss more than 2 classes, then your excess absences must be excused in order for you to avoid penalty. Refer to your MTU Student Handbook for the criteria used to determine an absence is excused or unexcused.

Final Course Grade

Your final grade in the course will depend on (1) your grades on the two major exams, (2) your course paper grade, (3) your class attendance and participation grade, and (4) your final exam grade, if you choose to take the final exam. If you choose not to take the final exam, then the percentages for your final course average will be as follows:

- Major Exam 1: 20%
- Major Exam 2: 20%
- Major Exam 3: 20%
- Course Paper: 20%
- Class Attendance and Participation: 20%

If you choose to take the final exam, then your final exam grade will determine 50% of your final course grade and the two items above—course paper, class attendance and participation—will determine the other 50%.

For the purpose of computing a final course average, letter grades will be converted to numbers. Course averages will be interpreted as follows: A: 93–100, AB: 88–93, B: 83–88, BC: 78–83, C: 73–78, CD: 68–73, D: 63–68, F: 0–63. Numerical grades will not be curved.

Records

You should keep all written work affecting your course grade (e.g., graded exams, course paper) until after the course is completed and you have received your final grade for the course. This will enable us to resolve any questions about your grades if they come up at the end of the term.

Disclaimer

Although the instructor will endeavor to follow the above-stated policies and procedures closely, he reserves the right to make reasonable changes if circumstances warrant. Any such changes will be announced in class and the reasons for making the changes will be given.